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# how to lobby congress

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE PRESENTED BY VENABLE'S LEGISLATIVE  
AND GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS TEAM

## WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Determine whether the issue is caused by a statute, regulation, case law or action/decision.

## WHAT IS THE SOLUTION OR GOAL?

- Amend existing law.
- Stop or amend pending legislation.
- Create new law.

## WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS TO ACHIEVE THE GOAL?

### Establish Strategy:

- Identify decision makers:
  - Congressional Members of the home state delegation where the client is headquartered or has an office.
  - Members of Congress who will have an understanding of the merits and maintain an interest in the issue at hand and who will consider being the lead proponent of the client's issue.
  - Members of Congress who serve on committees with jurisdiction over the client's industry and/or issue.
  - Congressional staff focused on your particular issue or industry.
  - Regulators and key staff of relevant federal agencies.
  - Associations or interest groups with similar interests.
- Build support in the broader public policy community.
- Identify those committees with jurisdiction over the issue.
- Determine whether there already is a coalition that deals with the issue or if one could be created.
- Draft an issue paper that explains the issue and the necessary actions needed to be taken to produce a positive outcome.
- Determine whether an outside consultant needs to be retained; for example, whether a media strategy needs to be developed to include a PR firm.

### Gather Intelligence:

- Familiarize yourself with the backgrounds of those you are to meet:
  - Review biographies and websites.
  - Review positions on various issues.
- Track legislation and media coverage pertinent to the issue.
- Reach out to various Hill or Administration contacts to get a sense of what may be the position of the legislator, White House or agency.

**Engage In Direct Advocacy:** Consider your audience and determine how to communicate the message most effectively.

- Meet with congressional or executive branch staff first to discuss the issue and determine the level of interest/understanding and whether there may be support for the client's position. If necessary, request to meet with the Senate and/or House Member to discuss and persuade the Member to support the issue.
- Follow up with the Member and staff by thanking them for their time.
- Maintain contact with those you have met.



# 10 tips for congressional meetings and visits

THINGS TO EXPECT AND WAYS TO MAXIMIZE THE VALUE OF HILL MEETINGS

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- 1 Begin every meeting by thanking the person with whom you are meeting for their time and the opportunity to meet with them.
- 2 Be ready to adapt to changing or unusual circumstances. Meetings on the Hill can and will take place anywhere – in a Member’s office, in a Committee Hearing room, in the hall or in the reception area. Don’t be surprised or put off by an unconventional environment.
- 3 Don’t be surprised to encounter interruptions, tardiness, canceled and rescheduled visits or early departures due to unexpected events.
- 4 It is necessary to plan visits with sufficient time to account for late meetings and interruptions and to allow time to get from one place to another. Thus, it can also be expected that there may be downtime between meetings.
- 5 Members of Congress and their staff have many demands on their time and are always juggling a myriad of competing issues – remember that your issue is just one of many with which they are dealing.
- 6 Be as brief and succinct as possible in making your points and presentations. There is nothing valued more on Capitol Hill than the ability to deliver information concisely and efficiently.
- 7 Be relaxed and conversational in speaking with staff.
- 8 Expect a neutral reaction — Members of Congress and their staff are rarely in a position to make firm commitments, and generally are cautious in doing so even if they are. An expression of willingness to continue dialogue or to continue working together is generally very positive. Even the mere indication of being willing to consider a proposal can be viewed as a positive signal.
- 9 In the case of a negative response, avoid being defensive or argumentative.
- 10 End every meeting by thanking the person with whom you are meeting for their time and the opportunity to meet with them.